

IID Director Jim Hanks – 03/19/2019 Comments
California State Water Resources Control Board
Meeting at the Salton Sea Yacht Club

Thank you for joining us here today at the forgotten and invisible Salton Sea. I want to share with you briefly the key lessons I have learned from the Drought Contingency Plan process and how it relates to the Salton Sea.

Over the past century, the Imperial Irrigation District has been the key leader in the Southwest for Colorado River affairs-- working not just for our own benefit, but for the benefit of all Colorado River communities as a whole. Leaders of our Valley were key to the formation of the Colorado River Compact between the seven basin states, providing the durable and adaptive framework for how the River operates to this day. Our own Congressman Phil Swing authored the Boulder Canyon Project Act to build the Hoover Dam providing flood protection, water storage, and power generation for Southern California, Arizona, and Nevada. We built the All-American Canal to serve the people of the Imperial and Coachella Valleys with reliable supplies of water and cheap and plentiful power in the process. In the QSA, we bore the brunt of the sacrifice to allow California to fit back into its 4.4 million acre-foot entitlement.

The reason I share with you this history, is because, it is now history. The good faith we have acted in over the course of a century has not only been unrequited, but insulted. Our consistent efforts have created greater stability and prosperity for all Colorado River water users, sometimes, to our own detriment. But today, just hours from now, a Drought Contingency Plan that excludes IID and ignores the catastrophic environmental and public health disaster at the Salton Sea will be celebrated. Perhaps in our rural naivete and our own tradition of neighborliness on the River we expected our

efforts would be reciprocated. Instead, they are ignored unmatched in our own time of need.

We were promised that as part of any Drought Contingency Plan, all parties would cross the finish line together after building essential consensus upon which the management of this stream is built. That was a lie.

Our sister California agencies, signatories to the QSA, pledged their mutual concerns and defense of the Salton Sea and to work together for the good of all California Colorado River water users. As evidenced by yesterday's 8-1 vote, that too was untrue.

The six other states of the Colorado River Basin preach about how critical collaboration, mutual understanding, and cooperation is to the success of Colorado River management. That is, until the name Salton Sea is so much as mentioned. At that point, as was the case in the past several weeks, other water agencies became more allergic to merely *naming* the Salton Sea in federal legislation than the asthmatic residents of Imperial Valley in the midst of a Salton Sea dust storm. As a result, the proposed federal legislation to pass the DCP has been excised of any reference to the Salton Sea, courtesy of our so-called "collaborative" "partners" on the River.

Though we have repeatedly plead our concerns for years about the Salton Sea, our requests that the DCP not negatively impact the Salton Sea were referred to as "unrealistic demands" by the Bureau of Reclamation. Only after the DCP became slowed by repeatedly blown arbitrary deadlines did the Bureau of Reclamation make an empty paper gesture toward the restoration and protection of the Salton Sea.

When we shared our grave concerns about the initially proposed federal legislation that read "Notwithstanding any other provision of law" as granting the Secretary of the Interior unfettered ability to waive environmental protections and key provisions of the

Law of the River to carry out the DCP, including those that protect the Salton Sea and California's senior water right, we were again rebuffed. Miraculously, within the past 24 hours, this proposed legislation was completely reworked.

Again and again throughout the DCP process, we were reminded of the "urgency" and "critical importance" of passing a DCP quickly. Committed to getting a DCP done, rather than getting it done right, the Reclamation Commissioner threw down deadline after deadline compressing the most key decisions and work as part of this five year long process into a matter of weeks and red-eyed sleepless nights. When the Salton Sea weighted down and slowed the supposedly urgent DCP, the IID and the Salton Sea were thrown overboard. It was based on this argument, that the DCP could not wait (yet somehow the deteriorating Salton Sea, thousands of dying birds, and Imperial Valley asthmatic children could), was the DCP shoved through.

Yet within the past few days, hydrology reports for the Colorado River indicate that not only will we *not* enter a shortage this year, but the recent record precipitation eliminated the risk of a shortage in 2020 and substantially reduced the risk for 2021. In other words, the critical urgency of the DCP was bogus. The declining Salton Sea did not have to become a sacrifice for the already improving Lake Mead.

After 5 years, what have I learned? Quite frankly, that in our supposedly progressive 2019, wealth trumps public and environmental health. That despite the Imperial Valley working for the benefit of this River system for over 107 years, being the single largest user of Colorado River water, and having the largest lake in the Colorado River basin in our backyard, our concerns are ignored as we are actively excluded--indicating that other Colorado River water users are more equal than the people of Imperial Valley.

As we gather here today on the shore of the Salton Sea strewn with bleached bones, bird carcasses, and a growing shoreline, and as champagne is being prepared for debauched self-congratulation in Phoenix, remember this. The IID is the elephant in the room on the Colorado River as we move forward. And like the elephant, our memory and rage is long.